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CLONING AND TEST TUBE BABIES

ANNCR:

HUMAN INFANTS CONCEIVED IN OTHER THAN THE TRADITIONAL WAY HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECT OF RECENT STORIES OF SCIENTIFIC FACT AND FICTION. VOA SCIENCE EDITOR LASZLO DOSA PREPARED THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

REPORTS FROM LONDON HAVE ANNOUNCED THE IMPENDING BIRTH BY CAESAREAN DELIVERY OF A BABY, CONCEIVED IN A TEST TUBE BUT GROWN IN ITS MOTHER'S WOMB. AND JUST ONE DAY EARLIER CAME WORD THAT A PROMINENT BRITISH SCIENTIST FILED A SEVEN-MILLION DOLLAR LIBEL SUIT AGAINST THE AUTHOR AND PUBLISHER OF A BOOK WHICH CLAIMS THAT A BABY BOY WAS BORN AS THE RESULT OF A TECHNIQUE KNOWN AS CLONING.

THE STORIES OF THE TEST TUBE BABY ABOUT TO BE BORN AND THE CLONED BABY ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN BORN MORE THAN A YEAR AGO SEEM TO BE SIMILAR AT FIRST GLANCE. IN REALITY, HOWEVER, THERE IS A VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO. ONE IS FACT, THE OTHER, THE STORY OF THE CLONED BABY, IS FICTION OR, AS SOME WOULD SAY IT, FRAUD.

BRITISH GYNECOLOGIST PATRICK STEPTOE AND PHYSIOLOGIST ROBERT EDWARDS -- BOTH REPUTABLE SCIENTISTS OF INTERNATIONAL FAME -- ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TEST TUBE BABY. SEVERAL YEARS AGO, IN A LECTURE DELIVERED TO A MEDICAL GROUP IN WASHINGTON, DOCTOR STEPTOE DESCRIBED THE TECHNIQUE WHICH WAS THEN STILL CONFINED TO ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS.

SOME WOMEN ARE UNABLE TO CONCEIVE BECAUSE AN ANATOMICAL DEFECT PREVENTS THE MALE SPERM FROM REACHING AND FERTILIZING

THE EGG, OR OVUM, IN THEIR WOMB. DOCTORS STEPTOE AND EDWARDS, IN AN EFFORT TO HELP THESE WOMEN HAVE BABIES, HAVE DEVISED A WAY TO SURGICALLY REMOVE THE MATURE EGG FROM THE WOMB, FERTILIZE IT IN THE TEST TUBE WITH THE SPERM AND, A FEW DAYS LATER AS THE FUSED CELLS BEGAN MULTIPLYING, PLACE THEM BACK INTO THE WOMB.

THIS IS THE TECHNIQUE THE BRITISH DOCTORS USED NEARLY NINE MONTHS AGO TO START THE PREGNANCY OF THE WIFE OF A RAILWAY WORKER. AND NOW, HAVING CARRIED THE TEST TUBE BABY TO FULL TERM, IT WILL BE REMOVED FROM THE WOMB SURGICALLY, BY CAESAREAN DELIVERY -- APPARENTLY TO PREVENT ANY COMPLICATIONS.

THE REPORT OF THE TEST TUBE BABY HAS ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE MEDICAL AND PUBLIC ATTENTION BECAUSE THIS IS THE FIRST KNOWN CASE OF HUMAN CONCEPTION OUTSIDE THE WOMB. MEDICAL AUTHORITIES AGREE THAT FOR ALL ITS NOVELTY, THE TECHNIQUE IS FEASIBLE, BUT IT WILL BE KNOWN ONLY AFTER THE ACTUAL DELIVERY OF THE BABY WHETHER IT IS A NORMAL, HEALTHY INFANT.

THE OTHER STORY, ABOUT THE CLONED CHILD, STARTED A FEW MONTHS AGO WITH THE PUBLICATION OF A BOOK BY DAVID RORVIK. HE CLAIMED, BUT DECLINED TO FURNISH ANY PROOF, THAT DOCTORS HAVE TAKEN A CELL FROM A SIXTY-YEAR-OLD MAN, TRANSPLANTED ITS NUCLEUS INTO THE HOLLOWED EGG CELL OF A YOUNG WOMAN, PLACED IT INTO HER WOMB, AND NINE MONTHS LATER SHE GAVE BIRTH TO A BABY BOY. ACCORDING TO RORVIK, THE CHILD IS A PRECISE GENETIC COPY OF THE FATHER, GENETICALLY UNRELATED TO THE MOTHER.

SCIENTISTS HAVE BEEN EXPERIMENTING WITH THIS TECHNIQUE, CALLED CLONING, FOR SEVERAL YEARS WITH FROGS. BUT THE TECHNIQUE IS STILL HIGHLY EXPERIMENTAL AND IT MAY NEVER WORK WITH HUMANS. THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY HAS DENOUNCED AUTHOR RORVIK AND HIS PUBLISHER FOR INSISTING THAT THE STORY OF THE

CLONED BOY IS FACT, RATHER THAN FICTION. AND NOW, DOCTOR J.D. BROMHALL, OF OXFORD UNIVERSITY, HAS FILED A SUIT AGAINST RORVIK AND HIS PUBLISHER BECAUSE THE BOOK TENDS TO "CREATE THE IMPRESSION THAT BROMHALL WAS COOPERATING OR IN SOME WAY HAD HELPED AND WAS VOUCHING FOR THE ACCURACY OR CREDIBILITY OF THE BOOK."

DOCTOR BROMHALL IS ALSO DEMANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER DECLARE THE BOOK A WORK OF FICTION AND, IF HE WINS THE SEVEN-MILLION DOLLAR SUIT, THE BRITISH SCIENTISTS WANTS TO DONATE THE MONEY TO SUPPORT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH.

BML/RCS